

Busted!

As [Tamar] was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. . . . “See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are” (Genesis 38:25).

Scripture: Genesis 38:6-11, 13-18, 24-26

Song: “Great Are You Lord”

Scenic back roads beckon me home each day after work. It’s a relaxing drive following a long day. Spotting deer or a flock of turkeys is common, but it can also be easy to speed. Recently, I popped over a hill, and a police car sat beside the road with a radar gun pointed my way. I hit my brakes too late. He pulled out behind me and threw on his lights. Busted! Slowly, I pulled over and awaited punishment. Thankfully, the officer met me with sweet mercy and gave me a warning instead of a ticket.

When we’re not keeping in step with God’s Spirit, we end up on the wrong side of God’s law of love. Our flesh is rebellious, selfish, desiring its own way instead of the good things God has planned for us. When we confess our sin, however, God meets us with mercy, just as He did when we first came to Him for salvation.

In God’s great plan, Jesus took our sin on himself so that we could be free to live in fellowship with Him and learn to walk in His ways. In Him, we go from busted to beloved.

Father, thank You for extending Your sweet mercy. I’ll honor You by extending mercy to others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

December 11–17. **Melinda Eye Cooper** lives in Tennessee. She has three sons, two daughters-in-law, four beautiful granddaughters, and a spunky dog.

Little Signs

[Rahab said,] “Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will save us from death” (Joshua 2:12-13).

Scripture: Joshua 2:1-6, 8-16

Song: “Himself”

When a new job came my way with a company that managed homeowner associations, it was a refreshing change. But I knew nothing about the business. Once I started to learn my new job, I began noticing little signs staked in the ground outside of many subdivisions, each one indicating who managed the property. Due to all I’d learned, I now knew what they meant, and I saw them everywhere.

Rahab was outside Israel’s community, and so she understandably sought a sure sign to guarantee the safety of her family. In our own lives as believers, we may be tempted to seek a sign from God for assurance or to help us find His direction.

However, as God’s people, instead of looking for a sign from God, we can seek God himself. In our genuine search to draw near to Him, we’ll come to know Him increasingly and find Him faithful. Then we’ll see the many signs of His protection and provision in our lives that, perhaps, we’d been overlooking because we didn’t really know Him well enough. Through studying His Word, praying full-heartedly, and surrendering our will to His, we’ll see signs of His goodness everywhere. When we’re seeking Him in these ways, He won’t fail to reveal His love to us.

Father, I don’t need signs because I know I can trust You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Trust Test

As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy (James 5:11).

Scripture: James 5:1-11

Song: "Walk by Faith"

Money was tight when my kids were young. Once, I put \$10 worth of gas in my car and handed a check to the cashier. She handed me back \$90 in cash. I held the money, confused for a moment, and then realized the problem. "My check was for \$10," I said as I handed back the cash. She put the money in her cash drawer, and I headed to my car with a heavy heart. I *needed* \$90. Doing the right thing doesn't always feel good.

Job persevered during God's thorough examination of his faith. At the end of that testing, God brought tremendous blessing. God will also test us. When He does, it may be that He's building our faith or teaching us an important lesson. Sometimes the testing may be brief, or it may take years.

God gives the most important and vital tests. He knows us inside and out. He knows our thoughts, intentions, and attitudes (Psalm 139:1-4). He finishes the work He has begun in us to make us more like Jesus (Philippians 1:6). We can expect a trust test or two along the way, but we can also know that God keeps His promises and is forever faithful.

Father, help me persevere during times of trial, knowing You are establishing my trust in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Forgotten Spanking

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief (1 Timothy 1:13).

Scripture: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Song: “Grace Greater Than Our Sin”

One Sunday when I was a kid, I was behaving badly in church. After multiple warnings from my dad to “straighten up,” he resorted to promising me a spanking when we got home. His words finally forced me to behave. The time seemed to creep slowly by as we drove home from church, and my angst grew with each passing mile. When we got home, I went straight to my room and stayed there, and before I knew it, bedtime came. I slipped peacefully to sleep, thankful for my dad’s forgetfulness.

Paul knew how badly he’d behaved before his life-changing encounter with Jesus. He was grateful for God’s mercy toward him. Our Heavenly Father has been merciful toward us as well, giving us what we don’t deserve (mercy) and withholding from us what we do (punishment). He lavishes kindness on us by giving us an abundant life through His Son, including eternal life with Him in Heaven.

My dad probably didn’t forget my bad behavior and his promise to spank me. He just chose to extend grace and mercy. God deals with us as His children in a similar way. He is gracious toward us and full of mercy. There is no greater parent, and He loves us more than we can imagine.

Father, thank You for Your incredible mercy and forgiveness. I will live gratefully today in Your love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Greater Good

David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground (2 Samuel 12:16).

Scripture: 2 Samuel 11:1-5, 26–12:1-8, 15-18, 24

Song: “Even If”

My co-worker Christi broke the fibula in her lower left leg while playing miniature golf. She had surgery to repair the bone, and the surgeon put a metal plate in her leg. Part of her recovery included physical therapy twice a week. We were discussing her therapy one day, and she said, “It’s painful to endure, but it will be worth it to heal properly. It’s for the greater good.” Her words were about her body, but they resonated with spiritual truth.

David did everything within his power to save his child, but it didn’t change the outcome. Accepting God’s will for our lives can be tough, and keeping our hearts from hardening can be a challenge. We can’t see the greater good when our vision is blurred with tears. But God sees the big picture and is working everything for our good—even the hardest things to understand.

We need to heal properly after a trauma in life. Even in healing, though, there will be pain. We may grieve deeply, but grief is part of healing. Placing our trust in God’s sovereign plan, as David did, is an important part of healing properly. In life, we might do everything within our power to help our situation, but ultimately, we need to trust God’s wisdom.

Father, even in my pain, help me trust Your wisdom and goodness. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Why Don't You Trust Me?

Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you (Psalm 9:10).

Scripture: Psalm 9:1-14

Song: "Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus"

Why don't you trust Me with your children? It seemed God was speaking clearly to my spirit, and it stunned me as I wrestled with the idea of putting my 3-year-old in childcare. I didn't realize that by worrying about my youngest son's care, I wasn't trusting God. I didn't want him in childcare, but I knew I needed to work. Immediately, I placed my trust in God and began a local job search. I left childcare in God's powerful hands. Amazingly, I ended up with a job at a church with *free* onsite childcare.

Incredible things happen when we trust the one who loves us most. Trusting Him through one life experience after another underscores the truth of His Word: He is trustworthy. If things go well, we can praise Him. If things go sideways, we can look to Him prayerfully to lead us through the difficult times. Eventually, the outcome of our trust in Him will manifest as unshakable faith. In fact, our trials build trust in a way nothing else can.

Trusting God in those hard places where we must let go of our desires leads us into a relationship with Him that is deeper than we could have otherwise known. He already knows our thoughts, fears, and intentions. He works for our good and always has our best interests at heart in any and every situation.

Father, show me areas in my life where I need to trust You more. In Jesus' name, amen.

Make Jesus Known!

Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife (Matthew 1:5-6).

Scripture: Matthew 1:1-17

Song: "Only Jesus"

During rush hour at a Washington, D.C., subway, a well-known violinist played anonymously, not for attention but as an experiment. In 43 minutes, Joshua Bell played six classical masterpieces on one of the most expensive instruments in the world. A total of 1,097 people passed by as he played. Few stopped to listen. They didn't know that the person playing in the subway had sold out a symphony hall only three days earlier. In fact, only one person recognized him.

In today's passage, Bathsheba is mentioned only as Uriah's wife, even though she was the mother of Solomon, one of history's most famous kings. It's a reminder that while we may wish to be seen and acknowledged for who we are and what we have accomplished, at times we might not be. Of course, that can be frustrating because, by nature, we want to be known and to make our mark on the world.

But truth be told, the real name worth knowing and making known is *Jesus*. People all around us need to know of Him and His gift of salvation. God offers the "music" of His beautiful gospel, and He sends it to places we might never expect to go. Let's follow Him there!

Father, grant me courage to speak the gospel boldly and to make Your Son's name known. In Jesus' name, amen.